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Chairman: Mr. Busacca ..... (Italy)
later: Mr. Wissa (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Egypt)

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97-82400 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 108: promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/52/90, A/52/116-S/1997/317, A/52/348, A/52/437, A/52/447-S/1997/775, A/52/482, A/52/523, A/C.3/52/3)

1. **Mr. Melenevsky** (Ukraine), after stressing the important contribution made by various United Nations bodies to the solution of the problems faced by children worldwide, said that there was an urgent need to adopt measures at the national, regional and international levels to alleviate the situation of children in many regions of the world, including children under particularly difficult circumstances, since that situation was constantly deteriorating. In that connection, his delegation commended the work of the Working Group of the Commission on Human Rights on the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child against the participation of children in armed conflicts.

2. With regard to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, his delegation welcomed the first World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm in 1996, which had called for better implementation of the existing legal instruments within the United Nations system. It was important to ensure the full observance by Member States of the provisions of the Convention, and of the Programme of Action for the Prevention of the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography adopted by the Commission on Human Rights in 1991; at the same time, it was necessary to determine whether it was expedient to draft the optional protocol, since that work could duplicate the activity of other United Nations bodies in that field. In that connection, his delegation stressed the importance of the decision taken by the General Assembly in resolution 51/186 to convene a special session in the year 2001 to review the achievement of the goals of the World Summit for Children held in New York in 1990.

3. Abiding by the principles laid down in its Constitution and the decisions taken in international forums, Ukraine had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991; in addition, in order to coordinate the implementation of the Convention, and the provisions of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, Ukraine had set up an interdepartmental commission in 1996 with the task of considering the issues that required a cross-sectoral coordination of the implementation of the Convention and preparing annual reports on the situation of children in Ukraine; and had established programmes entitled "Family planning" (1995) and "The children of Ukraine" (1996) which set forth concrete measures to be taken by the State and society in order to improve the situation of children. Lastly, Ukraine supported the recommendation in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action that States which had ratified the Convention should consider the possibility of withdrawing their reservations to the Convention in order to ensure its complete and effective application.

4. **Mr. Al-Humaimidi** (Iraq) said that, in line with the various international initiatives related to children, the promotion of children and of their welfare were a priority in Iraq's development plans. Thus, Iraq had adopted laws on child welfare (1982), infant welfare (1980), social welfare (1980), compulsory education (1986) and treatment of juvenile delinquents (1983); those legislative measures had culminated in Iraq's accession to the Convention in 1994. However, the considerable efforts that were being made for the benefit of children at the national and international levels were being hindered by grave violations of their rights, since, throughout the world, a great many children were victims of displacements of populations, drug abuse, sexual exploitation, corruption, armed conflict and malnutrition.

5. In addition, there were the children who were suffering from the effects of the sanctions imposed by the United Nations for political reasons, as in the case of Iraq. The economic sanctions imposed against Iraq had now entered their eighth year and had had destructive and tragic effects. Iraq's initiatives to help children, which had been commended by international organizations, had been seriously damaged by those sanctions, and the United Nations bodies working in that sphere were reporting that the state of health of children was continuing to deteriorate.

6. In Iraq, over 4 million citizens, mostly children under the age of five, were suffering from significant mental and physical damage. That appalling figure, and the appeals of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Food Programme (WFP), highlighted the need to meet the urgent needs of the Iraqi people. Malnutrition rates were rising, especially among children and women; water contamination and the deterioration of health services had led to an ever higher mortality rate resulting from infectious diseases and epidemics. In a statement made in Geneva on 3 October 1996, the representative of UNICEF in Baghdad had indicated that 4,500 Iraqi children under the age of five were dying every month because of malnutrition and preventable diseases.

7. The shortage of medical equipment, poor functioning of existing equipment and the lack of medicines and other medical supplies, resulting from the continuation of economic sanctions and the shortage of financial resources, made it extremely difficult to treat childhood diseases and save their lives. In addition, despite the significant efforts of Iraq's health institutions and the assistance provided by some humanitarian organizations and United Nations bodies, the situation was also serious for women and the elderly.

8. The mortality rate from diarrhoeal diseases in children under the age of five had been 2,260 in July, compared with 142 in July 1989, an increase of 1,491 per cent; in that same age group and on the same dates, the mortality rate from respiratory infections had increased from 98 to 1,032 (953.6 per cent), and the mortality rate from malnutrition had increased from 138 to 2,371 (1,618 per cent). The dangers faced by Iraqi children were more serious than those involved in direct military aggression, and those threats violated all their rights. Consequently, the first step to put an end to the suffering of those children and prevent their death was to remove the sanctions against Iraq.

9. **Archbishop Martino** (Observer for the Holy See) expressed the Holy See's dissatisfaction with remarks made the previous day about the Catholic Church and pointed out that the Church was one of the greatest sources for providing help and care to children worldwide.

10. It seemed inconceivable, but the tragic reality was that the future awaiting many children was prostitution, drug addiction, fighting as child soldiers, separation from their families, work in exploitative conditions, sexual, physical or psychological abuse, or dying as a result of armed conflict. According to the Executive Director of UNICEF, 650 million children were living in conditions of almost unimaginable suffering and want; an estimated 2 million were involved in prostitution, and over 250 million children were working in hazardous and intolerable conditions. Many others were dying from malnutrition, disease, lack of clean water and sanitation, drug abuse and life on the street.

11. It was time for the international community to address the problems affecting children effectively; in order to do so, it must not only seek out the causes of those violations of the rights of children, but also bring about solutions which were known to exist and which would work. Children were frequently the victims of human rights abuses because they were the weakest and most defenceless; for that reason, before considering and proposing policies to combat those abuses, it was necessary to understand clearly that children had rights precisely because they were human beings, who shared fully in human dignity from conception until natural death.

12. Solutions aimed at eliminating violations of the rights of children must be rooted in the family, the basic unit of society, where children developed an understanding of themselves and the world. Where there are strong family ties, children grew up with greater personal stability, less vulnerability and more effective enjoyment of their rights, including the right to life and the right to education. Further, in the context of the family, children found those who most willingly and effectively afforded them protection. For that reason, great care must be taken to assist parents in order to enable them to exercise their rights and carry out their duties in caring for and rearing their children.

13. The Secretary-General, in his message in connection with the observance of the International Day of the Family in May 1997, had said that conflicts assaulted the very foundation of society — families. He had pointed out that it was necessary to restore the sacredness of the family as a bedrock of humane values everywhere and that only if families were protected from famine and fragmentation could they prosper and contribute to the family of nations that was the United Nations. The Holy See was convinced that the abuse of the rights of children must be brought to an end and that, in strengthening and protecting the family and the role of parents, the world's children would be protected from many of the evils that threatened them and would be given real cause for hope in the future.

14. **Ms. Narcisse** (Haiti) said that, on 8 June 1995, Haiti had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and that, under the 1987 Constitution, the Haitian State guaranteed children the right to education and provided for the physical, intellectual, moral and civic education of the population. Primary education was mandatory and education was the task of the State and territorial communities, which must provide accessible free education for all. In addition, the legislation provided for the establishment of public institutions to protect children in particularly difficult circumstances and had established a Juvenile Court and a High Court for Juveniles.

15. Nevertheless, the legislation was not being carried out and, therefore, was only a statement of intentions. It was calculated that, from 1990 to 1995, the rate of enrolment in primary education was 25 per cent for boys and 26 for girls. During the same period, only 47 per cent of the children who had entered first grade had reached fifth grade. In addition to that, there was a lack of specialized institutions for assisting children. Further, the situation of children in Haiti was critical because of poor economic and social conditions,

poverty, rural exodus, anarchic urbanization and family disintegration. As a result, her Government was redoubling its efforts in order to intervene in that field with such measures as the national programme for school cafeterias, the aim of which was to improve the school performance of children and achieve complete and lasting development in the long term.

16. With regard to street children, she pointed out that, according to a study carried out jointly in 1991 by UNICEF and the Social Welfare Institute of Haiti, it had been calculated that the population of street children in the capital, Port-au-Prince, had been between 5,000 and 10,000. Their average age was 11 and, although they were mostly boys, the proportion of girls, which had been 18 per cent in 1991 in Port-au-Prince, seemed to be on the increase. The lives of those children were characterized by a low level of education, pitiful hygienic conditions, improper nourishment, promiscuity frequently leading to child prostitution and homosexuality, the habitual use of narcotic drugs, and an everyday existence marked by violence. In order to cope with those subhuman living conditions, they sometimes resorted to theft, prostitution and other offences.

17. Children who carried out domestic work lived in atrocious conditions: they received room and board for performing domestic tasks and were usually the victims of the living conditions of the host families, which, frequently, could not meet their own needs. Those children, ranging from 4 to 18 years of age, were deprived of education, care and affection and were made to carry out work beyond their physical ability with unregulated working hours and in humiliating conditions. It was calculated that, in Haiti, some 300,000 children were living in that situation, 74 per cent of whom were girls and 26 per cent boys, in spite of the fact that the Labour Code of Haiti prohibited entrusting a family with a child younger than 12 for domestic work and penalized all violations and abuses.

18. Children were, therefore, among those sectors of the population that were the most affected by the economic, social and political crises. As a result, Haiti was convinced that international cooperation was necessary in order to eliminate the exploitation of children through work and all forms of child labour contrary to accepted international standards; her country also recommended that States should redouble their efforts not only in drawing up legislation, but also in supervising its implementation, and considered that the commitment to reconstruct a lasting social environment for the protection and development of children should continue to guide the activities by all States in order to achieve a greater survival rate, harmonious development and the effective protection of children.

19. **Mr. Al-Omar** (Kuwait) said that the Constitution of Kuwait included several articles for the promotion and protection of children's rights. They included articles on the family and children, and others on the protection of children from exploitation and from social or physical neglect. Kuwait had formulated a five-year development plan, providing for the creation of mechanisms for child welfare within the family, care of children in accordance with the principles of Islam, and participation by mothers in society and employment. Under the plan, the Government had established infants' schools and private day-care centres, and had set up a programme of mother and child health services, creating centres for immunization against poliomyelitis, measles and tuberculosis. Thanks to those measures, the rates of infant mortality and of mortality during childbirth had fallen to less than ten per thousand live births.

20. His Government believed that education was a human right and was of the utmost importance for the social integration of the child outside the family. Education in Kuwait was therefore universal, free and compulsory at the primary and intermediate levels.

21. Kuwait had suffered from the inhuman practices of the Iraqi invasion, which had been a flagrant violation of the rights of children in situations of armed conflict. Some Kuwaiti children had lost their lives, while others had remained traumatized by the consequences of the military occupation. Kuwait was therefore doing all it could to help those children by providing psychological and social rehabilitation services.

22. **Mr. Rahman** (Bangladesh) said that, despite positive developments such as the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the survival and development of millions of children continued to be threatened. The international community should therefore act urgently to address some of the specific problems affecting children, especially the exploitation of child labour, which was most widespread in the least developed countries. In order to address that problem in a humane and constructive way, while taking into account the country's socio-economic needs, Bangladesh had begun a process for the phased elimination of child labour. In 1995, it had signed a tripartite memorandum of understanding with the International Labour Organization and UNICEF to eliminate child labour in the garments sector, which was one of the largest employers of children. The goal of the memorandum of understanding, which provided for the education of the children concerned, was to address the problems of poverty and illiteracy, which were the factors directly responsible for the situation. The Government had also undertaken a basic education project to address the needs of working children in urban areas. That

process was working effectively and could serve as a model for other countries.

23. Concerning the problem of the commercial sexual exploitation of children, his Government believed that special measures must be taken to eradicate that crime and address its root causes. Such measures could be based on the Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action adopted in 1996. Another effective instrument for combating that evil would be the optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Bangladesh also believed that concrete actions should be adopted to address the situation of children in difficult circumstances, including those with disabilities, street children, refugee children and children in situations of armed conflict.

24. Bangladesh had established national machinery for the promotion and protection of the rights of children. It had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted a national programme of action and a national policy for children, established a national council for children's welfare, and begun formulating a national plan of action for children's development up to the year 2000.

25. His Government was investing heavily in the education of children, in the belief that it was the fundamental tool for their development. In that context, it had adopted a 10-year action plan to address the special needs and the development of girl children, and to protect their rights. Legislation had been enacted to address problems such as early marriage, rape, trafficking in children, violence, sexual exploitation and child prostitution. The Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs had undertaken a project for the elimination of trafficking, kidnapping and sale of children in Bangladesh. Finally, his Government wished to express its appreciation to various United Nations agencies, particularly UNICEF, for their support in promoting the socio-economic development of Bangladesh and improving the condition of children.

26. **Ms. Setyowati** (Indonesia) said that the situation of many children throughout the world remained critical, although measures had been adopted to improve it, such as the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the work of UNICEF, and that of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

27. Child labour was one of the most serious problems. Her Government therefore supported the Agenda for Action adopted at the conference on child labour currently being held in Oslo, sponsored by the Government of Norway. That plan would foster cooperation between the developed and developing countries. Given that poverty was the main cause of child labour, her Government had allocated approximately 30 per cent of its national development budget to social development programmes, but it would need assistance from other States for that purpose, as well as the fulfilment of commitments for official development assistance. Her Government estimated that between two and three million children below the age of 15 were working in Indonesia, particularly in rural areas, where children began to help their parents at an early age. Also, because of the country's industrialization, children had begun working in urban areas.

28. Her Government had taken measures to try to address the problem of child exploitation in a comprehensive manner. In addition to implementing poverty alleviation programmes, it had taken action in a number of key areas. For instance, it had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which had been translated into the national language and had been disseminated in order to facilitate the implementation of a national programme on the survival, development and protection of mothers and children. The contents of the two conventions had been incorporated into the curricula of institutions of higher learning, including centres for women's studies in many universities in Indonesia. They had also been disseminated to journalists, the police, prosecutors and the judiciary, which should facilitate the implementation of the national law on juvenile justice and the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty.

29. Her Government also ensured the protection of the rights of the girl child and had therefore implemented a national programme within the school system to provide food for elementary school pupils, particularly girls in rural areas. It was also implementing a special programme aimed at preventing anaemia in prospective mothers.

30. Her Government viewed the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography as a new problem which required serious attention. In order to compensate for the lack of statistical data and national resources to eradicate that phenomenon, her Government had begun to mobilize the mass media and non-governmental organizations in order to raise awareness about those ills. In that regard, it should be noted that the Special Rapporteur had expressed appreciation to the Indonesian press for its efforts to increase the public's awareness of the problem of child prostitution.

31. The Government had made changes to the existing labour law and was considering ratifying Convention No. 138 of the International Labour Organization concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, which was

in line with her Government's target of nine years compulsory education for children throughout the country. Furthermore, Indonesia, which had been participating since 1992 in the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour of the International Labour Organization, had addressed the issue of child labour in its national development plan, and non-governmental organizations in Indonesia had begun to implement a national plan of action with support from the United Nations Children's Fund and the International Labour Organization.

32. Although her Government was attempting to strengthen its institutional capacity to enforce labour legislation and increase public awareness with respect to child labour, it recognized that legislation alone would not eliminate the problem of child labour. Elimination of that problem would require increasing children's access to education and reducing poverty.

33. **Mr. Ka** (Senegal) said that the situation of children continued to be precarious, especially in Africa. The international community should therefore seek a lasting solution to that situation within the framework of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action adopted by the World Summit for Children. In his delegation's view, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Plan of Action adopted in New York should be implemented on the basis of a multisectoral, global, integrated and participatory approach. The process would require the formulation of dynamic social mobilization policies and the mobilization of national and external resources, as well as concerted action at the national, regional and international levels. The capacity of communities to formulate and implement children's programmes would also have to be enhanced. National programmes and plans should be compatible with other instruments such as the Beijing Platform for Action and with the conclusions of the World Summit for Social Development and the World Food Summit.

34. The international community was fully aware of the vulnerability of the world's children. Such vulnerability was evident in the areas of education, health and nutrition as reflected by the school enrolment, immunization and mortality rates, inadequate access to drinking water, exploitation, abuse and other problems. Senegal was grateful for the continuous support provided by UNICEF in the implementation of the national child welfare plan; the Fund's support was provided under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For its part, his Government had formulated a special plan for working children and had ratified the various international conventions on child labour.

35. Despite the efforts made by African countries, the constraints resulting from the economic crisis hampered the effective implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Plan of Action, particularly in countries wracked by conflict. The work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child should be supported and the capacities of UNICEF and other agencies of the United Nations system that helped to implement such instruments should be enhanced.

36. The community of nations should include in its agenda the fight against transnational networks engaged in child trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children for commercial purposes, begging by children, the problems of street children, assistance for disabled children, the plight of children in strife-torn countries, and the education of girls.

37. **Ms. Kaba Camara** (Côte d'Ivoire) deplored the fact that documents on that agenda item had been submitted late and in English only. The United Nations should continue to be a multilingual Organization even in the face of the obvious predominance of the English language.

38. Fifty-one African countries had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the great majority of them had been involved in the formulation of the Declaration of the World Summit for Children. The commitment of African Governments had been demonstrated at the International Conference on Assistance to African Children, held in Dakar in 1992, at which a number of goals to be achieved by the end of 1995 had been set. The Conference had also decided to achieve the following goals by the year 2000: ensuring universal access to basic education, reducing malnutrition by half and achieving food security, achieving universal access to drinking water and sanitation, reducing under-five mortality by one third, and reducing maternal mortality by half. However, five years after the Dakar Conference, the data provided by UNICEF indicated that the under-five mortality rate was 175 per thousand live births (nearly double the world average) and that the maternal mortality rate was 980 per 100,000 live births, a figure that had not decreased since 1990. Moreover, few African countries had attained the objective of 90 per cent immunization coverage and, in 1996 and 1997, cases of meningitis and AIDS had increased. The factors that had led to the deterioration of the situation of children were the severe shortage of resources due to the decline in official development assistance by nearly 30 per cent; the drying up of external resource flows; the decline in commodity prices and the external debt burden; armed conflicts; the population explosion and unregulated urbanization; natural disasters; environmental degradation; drought; the AIDS pandemic; and malaria.

39. All that had had a devastating effect on African children. In Dakar, the development partners, the international financial institutions and the development organizations had committed themselves to contributing to the African Governments' efforts to fulfil the basic needs of the children. However, five years after the Dakar Conference, projects and programmes for children had declined.

40. Africa had committed itself fully to improving the life of its children whether in the context of ECOWAS or in that of the Great Lakes countries. Africa had institutionalized "corridors of peace" and "days of tranquillity" in order to facilitate the access of humanitarian organizations to the war victims. As far as national funding is concerned, the great majority of African countries had far surpassed the 20/20 initiative targets and devoted more than 20 per cent of their budgets to basic social services, health and education. Those efforts deserved the support of the international community.

41. It was too soon for many developing countries to consider measures to prohibit child labour since it was linked to poverty in the family. It would be advisable to look into the possibility of gradually reducing this phenomenon by setting a minimum working age, for example, of 14, and urging families to send their children to school. With retard to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, strategies should combine the fight against poverty, the education of children and their parents, the promotion of civic and moral values, and the strengthening of coercive measures against adults guilty of those acts. She welcomed the decision by many European countries to bring to trial and sentence perpetrators of sexual crimes against children. As well, States should severely punish people using the media and the Internet to promote such despicable acts.

42. She called upon all Member States to strengthen cooperation with a view to eradicating the inhuman practices that placed the lives of children in danger and her country supported the efforts of poor countries to promote the survival, protection and development of children. The objectives set at Dakar could be achieved since only eight cents protected a child against oral dehydration, seven cents protected it against onchocerciasis, 15 dollars vaccinated it against six of the main childhood illnesses and 150 dollars provided drinking water for a town of 250 inhabitants.

43. **Ms. Nicodemos** (Brazil) said that, notwithstanding the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, there was still a glaring gap between the principles enshrined in the Convention and the daily violations of children's basic rights worldwide. Both the international community as a whole and individual Member States shared the responsibility to bring about conditions favourable to the full exercise of the rights of children.

44. Her country was proud of having already attained most of the goals set by the 1990 World Summit for Children. The stabilization of the Brazilian economy had resulted in a general improvement of the living standard of the population. In only two years (1994-1996), the average worker's real income had risen by 20 per cent, while the percentage of poor people in the total population had decreased from 33 per cent to 25 per cent, which had benefited mostly children. A community solidarity programme had been set up to help needy municipalities develop their own programmes for basic health, education and sanitation and to channel existing resources to programmes that had a direct impact on children. According to a survey carried out in 2,500 cities, the infant morality rate had dropped from 41 children per one thousand live births in 1992 to 31 in 1994, and to 17.6 in 1996. In addition, the number of children receiving health care because of malnutrition had declined by 50 per cent.

45. The public policies for education and health were being decentralized in order to empower local communities to control the allocation of public funds and participate in the decisions on how to use them. The National Congress had approved in September 1996 a constitutional amendment that provided for an increase in basic education funds from $80 per child per year to $300. Furthermore, the number of community health workers would be increased from 44,000 to 100,000 by the end of 1998.

46. Her Government attached great importance to improving the protection of children in especially difficult circumstances. In addition to drafting an optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, the international community should continue to pursue ways to alleviate the suffering of children.

47. Brazil had sponsored Commission on Human Rights resolution 1994/90, which had established the working group for the elaboration of a draft optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. That protocol was needed to expand the provisions of the Convention, in particular articles 34 and 35.

48. Brazil had participated in the 1996 World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. Although the conclusions of the Congress virtually ignored key elements of the problem — poverty, underdevelopment, social exclusion and unemployment — the Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action constituted a positive contribution. Brazil had adopted a number of measures, including the establishment of a national network for

fighting the sexual exploitation of children, plans of action against the sexual abuse of children drawn up by state and municipal authorities, a national campaign against the exploitation of child sex tourism led by the National Tourism Agency, the Association of Hotels, airport authorities, air travel carriers and the press, as well as a toll-free hotline for reporting cases of the sexual exploitation of children.

49. In the area of child labour, her Government's public policies had focused on repressing illegal practices and attempting to eliminate the root causes of the problem. Among other measures, the President had launched a programme to provide monthly allowances to families so that they could send their children to school. The programme, which had initially targeted coal mines in Mato Grosso, currently covered sugar cane plantations, as well, and more than 22,000 families were receiving such allowances in the Federal District. In that connection, her Government had benefited from the technical cooperation offered by the International Labour Organization (ILO) through the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour.

50. **Mrs. Mangesho** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that her delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Namibia on behalf of the Southern African Development Community. It was encouraging that 191 countries had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, even though the original target of universal ratification was still far from being met. The United Republic of Tanzania had signed and ratified the Convention in 1991 and 1994, respectively, and was committed to its implementation and follow-up.

51. In view of the importance that it attached to children, her country had been represented by its Head of State at the World Summit for Children, held in New York in September 1990. Later, in June 1991, the National Assembly of the United Republic of Tanzania had approved and endorsed the goals set by the World Summit for the year 2000. With a view to fulfilling those goals, her Government had formulated a National Plan of Action for Children and had adopted a strategy for its implementation. The National Plan of Action took into account the following national priorities: combating malnutrition and diseases such as diarrhoea, malaria and chronic respiratory disease; combating iodine deficiency disorders and the HIV/AIDS epidemic; ensuring access to health, education, safe drinking water and sanitation; and the elimination of all forms of child exploitation. The strategy was designed to strengthen community-based systems for the analysis, management and advocacy of child-related issues at the household, village and district levels.

52. The goal of the World Summit regarding malnutrition had already been achieved for 20 per cent of Tanzanian children. The adult literacy rate was 68 per cent and primary school enrolment was 90 per cent. Currently, the fight against malaria and HIV/AIDS, the elimination of vitamin A deficiency, the reduction of the gap in education coverage and quality and the elimination of neonatal tetanus were priority issues. The United Republic of Tanzania devoted the Day of the African Child to reviewing the implementation of its National Plan for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. The Government was also finalizing a national policy on the rights of Tanzanian children.

53. Girls, who were at a disadvantage owing to a socialization process that was different from that of boys, the imposition of oppressive rules and insufficient legislative protection, were becoming — in a context of poverty and deteriorating moral values — more vulnerable to acts of violence, such as defilement, sexual harassment, genital mutilation and forced labour. In order to bring such practices to an end, the education policy had been revised and various laws that were discriminatory in such areas as marriage and inheritance were being reviewed. Her delegation requested the developed countries to assist the developing countries in addressing the problem of children's survival and development.

54. **Ms. Grant** (New Zealand) said that New Zealand had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993 and submitted its initial report under the Convention to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1997. Her Government was elaborating a strategy to address the specific issues highlighted by the Committee in its recommendations. In that context, non-governmental organizations played a constructive role both in assisting the Committee and in providing practical support to children around the world; the work of UNICEF was also worthy of special recognition.

55. The use of children in exploitative or hazardous work was a problem in many countries. As the problem was different in every country, it required a different solution in each case. Her delegation welcomed the ILO initiative to draft a new convention on child labour and hoped that such differences would be duly taken into account in that text. For example, her delegation believed that the establishment of a minimum age for entry into the workforce was not the best way to deal with the problem of child labour. In many cases, compulsory education up to a certain age coupled with protective measures against exploitative or hazardous child labour would be an effective way to solve the problem.

56. With regard to the commercial sexual exploitation of children, her Government encouraged other Governments to promote international cooperation among police and customs officials and to enact laws providing for the prosecution of persons who committed such crimes. Her delegation hoped that the draft optional protocol to the Convention relating to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography that was being elaborated would become a practical instrument as soon as possible and was committed to contributing to that process.

57. **Ms. Gustava** (Mozambique) said that children were exposed to various hazards even before birth: high rates of maternal infant mortality and malnutrition, inadequate health care and education, poverty, natural diasters and other socio-economic problems were serious threats to children. In particular, children were the main target in armed conflicts and became the most vulnerable refugees. After 16 years of war, thousands of Mozambican children were orphans, disabled or homeless; they had been forced to participate in the conflict, or had been the victims of anti-personnel landmines or objects of sexual exploitation. Most of the refugees and displaced persons whom the Government was attempting to reintegrate with the support of the international community and civil society were women and children. Special attention was being devoted to reuniting families — between 1988 and 1996, 14,605 out of 19,734 children had been reunited with their families — and special centres to address the specific concerns of street children had been set up.

58. Mozambique supported the global ban on anti-personnel landmines; in addition to demining activities, an extensive programme to educate children and communities about that danger had been launched.

59. *Mr. Wissa (Egypt), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

60. **Mrs. Ali** (Nigeria) said that concerted efforts were necessary at all levels in order to reduce violence against children, child labour, the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In particular, legislation must be enacted in order to guarantee responsible use of the media, such as television, video cassettes and the Internet, in order to ensure that children were not used in pornography or exposed to it.

61. Nigeria had submitted its initial report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 1996 and was studying the Committee's comments on it; in that context, a decree had been adopted with a view to harmonizing Nigerian legislation with the provisions of the Convention.

62. Promoting the rights of the child, which, in Nigeria, had traditionally been protected within the framework of the extended family, was the task of the Child Development Department of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development, which was responsible for initiating relevant policies and programmes. In addition, the Ministry had established children's rights implementation and monitoring committees at the national, state and local levels; a national task force had also been established to promote the education of girls by identifying and combating practices that were harmful to their development. Other mechanisms for promoting the rights of the child included the Children's Rights Information Bureau and the publicity and technical committee for the survival, development, protection and participation of children. Her country also observed the Nigerian National Children and Youth Day and the Day of the African Child and had established "The Children's Congress", which constituted a forum in which children could discuss issues of importance to their welfare and exchange views with the authorities, parents and other groups that provided for their health and education.

63. In view of the impact of armed conflicts on children, disarmament was a necessary ingredient in the promotion and protection of their rights. Moreover, the fight against poverty, the worst enemy of family and child welfare, must be given priority in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

64. **Mr. Najem** (Lebanon) said that his country had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and its accession to it had brought about legislative changes in that field. A parliamentary commission had been set up in order to supervise the process of accession and UNICEF had participated in a national project to implement the Convention through an action plan. The Higher Council for Children of the Ministry of Social Affairs had drawn up an action plan for the survival, protection, and the development of children, which had made considerable progress in numerous areas.

65. In the field of health, Lebanon was undertaking initiatives through the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs in order to ensure that each child had access to health services, in accordance with article 24 of the Convention. In the field of education and in accordance with articles 28 and 29 of the Convention, the national plan provided for mandatory and free primary education, which was to be carried out through modern educational methods in order to bring about the balanced development of children; in the area of protection and training, the action plan established programmes aimed at introducing education for peace in teaching, protecting children against the dangers of drugs

and sexual aggression, enacting laws on those offences and imposing severe sentences on those who committed them.

66. The children who had been living under the yoke of Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon and the Beka'a Valley since 1968 were enduring the results of occupation and terror. Their living conditions, education, social life and psychological state were impaired by the effects of the Israeli occupation policy, which was evident in the indiscriminate and daily bombing of towns in the southern part of the country. That situation, which was producing waves of emigration and had caused the closing of schools, had a negative impact on the health and behaviour of the children and interrupted their education. In that way, the Israeli occupation forces were violating basic principles of human rights and international instruments guaranteeing the rights of citizens under foreign occupation. Accordingly, Lebanon urged the international community to put pressure on Israel to make it put an end to that inhuman practice directed against the children of Lebanon.

67. **Ms. Gordon** (Jamaica) said that her country joined in the call to abolish child labour, particularly the most intolerable kinds. However, Jamaica was aware of the complex nature of the problem, including the reasons why children worked, a point that was stressed repeatedly in the report of the Secretary-General (A/52/523). Among the activities undertaken to reduce and abolish child labour, her delegation welcomed the initiative of the Norwegian Government to convene the Conference on Child Labour, currently being held in Oslo, and looked forward to receiving details on its outcome.

68. Jamaica fully agreed with the view expressed in the report of the Secretary-General that child labour was most often a result of poverty and that children worked because they needed to; therefore, if the work was to be eliminated, it must be replaced by something (education, food, shelter) which would make it unnecessary. In that connection, Jamaica noted the decision by the organizers of the Oslo Conference to focus on the issue of development as it related to child labour.

69. Jamaica also fully supported the Secretary-General's view insisting that the problem of child labour could not be addressed by only one actor in society (national Governments), but must be dealt with through collaboration among all the various actors: the international community, civil society and the public. That was an issue on which considerable work had already been done under the leadership of United Nations agencies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF. That meant that the only thing really left to do was to implement national legislation and the recommendations of ILO and relevant conferences on reducing child labour, beginning with its particularly intolerable forms. Jamaica was attempting to do all in its power to reduce the number of child labourers in the country (albeit a relatively small number), with the invaluable assistance of UNICEF, ILO and other agencies. She urged other countries to do the same.

70. **Ms. Camerano** (Colombia) said that although her country had made progress with regard to the poverty indicators relating to the child population, its efforts aimed not only at providing children with what they required in order to survive, but also to improve their quality of life. To that end, Colombia had taken such measures as defining a legal framework for protecting the rights of children, with the support of intergovernmental human rights agencies and focusing on fulfilment of the commitments undertaken by Colombia under the treaties that it had signed.

71. The current situation of violence in the country, owing to the struggle against drug trafficking and other forms of crime and terrorism, had a negative impact on the human rights of the population, especially the most vulnerable sector, children. Accordingly, protecting the rights of children was part of the overall policy in the field of human rights, which constituted a priority of the Government. Colombia had been the venue for the regional consultation on the effects of armed conflict on children, held in 1996 under the auspices of the United Nations. With regard to caring for and protecting children, her Government intended to attend to the needs of the children affected by war.

72. Colombia had also signed an agreement with the International Committee of the Red Cross to provide humanitarian assistance to children who were the victims of anti-personnel landmines and attacks and had begun to carry out programmes for children who were the victims of kidnapping. In order to help children displaced by violence, Colombia had set up a presidential commission, which coordinated activities in the area of prevention, immediate assistance and economic stabilization with the ultimate objective of the return of the displaced persons to their homes. In order to put an end to international trafficking in and exploitation of children, Colombia had set up an inter-institutional committee against the sale and sexual exploitation of children. A national plan had been drawn up against domestic violence, which had serious consequences for the development of children and perpetuated cycles of violence.

73. All those plans, programmes and strategies had been incorporated in the new Children's Code, which stressed prevention as an integral part of measures for protecting the

rights of the child. Furthermore, the 1991 Constitution stipulated that all citizens must ensure that the rights of the child were respected. Those measures would not be such a high priority if peace and well-being prevailed in the country. Although Colombia had made great strides in combating poverty, 3 per cent of the gross national product was still allocated to the war instead of social programmes. In that regard, her Government expressed appreciation to the countries that supported the peace process in order to promote the progress of society and the future of children.

74. **Mr. Borel** (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that there had hardly been any improvement in the plight of children who were the victims of armed conflict since the submission of the report on the consequences of those conflicts for children (the report of Mrs. Machel). It was, however, encouraging to see the mobilization of civil society and the international community on their behalf.

75. For the third consecutive year, ICRC had been asked by the Commission on Human Rights to take part in the working group on preparing a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which aimed, in particular, at raising the minimum age for the recruitment of children and their participation in hostilities. ICRC was firmly in favour of the minimum age being raised to 18, in conformity with the plan of action of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement on behalf of children affected by armed conflict.

76. First, the draft optional protocol must prohibit all participation — direct or indirect — by children in hostilities. If only some forms of participation in hostilities were prohibited, that would weaken the more comprehensive provisions of the 1977 Protocol II to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. However, in many cases, it was almost impossible to distinguish between direct and indirect participation in conflicts and between voluntary and forced recruitment.

77. Furthermore, the provisions of the draft optional protocol should apply to all the parties to a conflict, including non-international armed conflicts, because it was precisely in such conflicts that children faced the greatest risks. Humanitarian law applicable in such situations created humanitarian rights and obligations for armed groups, without in any way granting them international recognition. It was therefore possible from a legal point of view, and absolutely crucial from a humanitarian point of view, that dissident forces or armed groups should be bound by the provisions of the draft optional protocol and that they should respect its rules.

78. ICRC called upon States to make a positive contribution to the next session of the working group in order to draw up rapidly a text that would extend a greater degree of protection to children. In addition to enacting new rules, it was necessary to ensure effective implementation of the law, notably by establishing the mechanisms required to prevent violations. That was why the ICRC had proposed that the recruitment of children into armed forces or armed groups should be included in the list of war crimes falling within the purview of the international criminal court.

79. **Mr. Petersen** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) twice said that, as the report of Mrs. Machel had recognized, UNHCR was one of the first agencies to intervene in emergency situations. It was therefore able to attend to the needs of children affected by war, who constituted the majority of refugee and displaced children. It should be pointed out that 52 per cent of the 23 million persons assisted by the Office were under the age of 18.

80. In order to follow up the report of Mrs. Machel, UNHCR had drawn up an internal strategy supported by the Standing Committee of the Office's Executive Committee. The strategy had set out performance objectives for assisting and protecting refugee children and adolescents and had established a system that would improve staffing, training and budgeting in order to achieve those objectives. The High Commissioner had requested UNHCR directors and representatives to draw up plans of action showing how each office intended to implement the recommendations of the report. UNHCR would concentrate on five areas of particular concern: unaccompanied children, adolescents, education, sexual exploitation and preventing and monitoring the recruitment of children. The plans of action would be integrated into the annual programming cycle and field operations and would be implemented with the help of non-governmental organizations.

81. The protection of refugee children and adolescents was at the core of UNHCR activities throughout the world. In collaboration with members of the International Save the Children Alliance, the Office was preparing a training package that would combine field-based training for UNHCR staff and their implementing partners with pilot projects. In 1997, four major capacity-building exercises had been implemented and 12 more were planned for 1998. In addition, six senior regional adviser posts on questions related to children and adolescents had been established.

82. UNHCR strongly urged States to be guided by the principles and provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and take into account the rights of children and

adolescents in drafting the proposed statute of the future international criminal court. The Office also supported the ongoing efforts concerning the draft optional protocol to the Convention with regard to the involvement of children in armed conflict.

83. **Mrs. Castro de Barish** (Costa Rica), speaking also on behalf of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, said that she associated herself with the statement made by the delegation of Paraguay on behalf of the Rio Group. She underscored the fact that the Central American countries had signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child soon after its adoption by the General Assembly, as was indicated in the report of the Secretary-General on the status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/52/348). That support for the Convention had also been reflected in their support for the amendment to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention to increase the number of experts on the Committee on the Rights of Child from 10 to 18, adopted under General Assembly resolution 50/155. She urged States parties that had not yet done so to indicate their acceptance of that amendment to the Secretary-General so that it could enter into force. She also urged States that had not yet done so to accede to the Convention as a matter of priority. Furthermore, the States parties which had expressed reservations should consider the possibility of withdrawing them since they impeded the effective implementation of the Convention in some cases.

84. The situation of children affected by armed conflict was cause for concern. In that regard, the report of Graça Machal was clear proof of all the suffering and the consequences of such situations. The Central American countries highly commended the statement made at the previous meeting by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict. The report submitted by Mrs. Ofelia Calcetas-Santos, the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/52/482), was also commendable. Lastly, her delegation expressed its commitment to continue its joint efforts to promote and protect the rights of children throughout the world, particularly in the Central American region.

85. **Ms. Ouedraogo** (Burkina Faso) said that her country had submitted its initial report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in accordance with article 44 of the Convention and that the National Committee for Children, entrusted with following up and evaluating the national plan of action for children, was preparing the first periodic report. The National Committee's permanent secretariat conducted information and consciousness-raising activities with respect to the national plan (1997-2000) and the Convention. The draft periodic report, which was being drawn up by consultants, would be submitted to a seminar for evaluation before it was transmitted for approval to the Council of Ministers, which would then forward it to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

86. In view of the fruitful cooperation between that Committee and United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations, Burkina Faso regretted that agencies like the World Bank and the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS had not established similar relations based on cooperation. Those agencies should include the question of the rights of the child in their programmes.

87. The States parties to the Convention should reinforce their policies aimed at guaranteeing the survival, well-being and development of children, who, in many cases, were the victims of mistreatment, sexual abuse and various types of exploitation. Account should be taken of the fact that developing countries were encountering financial, logistic, material, structural and technical difficulties in implementing the Convention. Burkina Faso expressed appreciation for the support provided by UNICEF in that regard. The international community should assume its responsibility for promoting respect for the socio-economic and cultural rights of children. Redistributing available resources for the benefit of children and converting debt to assist social programmes were unable to neutralize the impact of the developing countries' socio-economic problems.

88. One out of every four children from 5 to 14 years of age worked in the developing world and was subject to exploitation or risked his life. The basic causes of child labour should be studied at the national level in order to draw up programmes for solving that problem, giving priority to eliminating its most intolerable forms through poverty eradication, free and mandatory education, the strengthening of relevant legislation and its effective implementation, and the promotion of vocational training courses and consciousness-raising campaigns. Burkina Faso recognized the work carried out by ILO and UNICEF in that regard.

89. It was also necessary to consider the administration of penal justice with regard to prosecuting the persons responsible in cases involving prostitution, pornography and paedophilia and in order to preserve the integrity and dignity of children in such situations.

90. Her country hoped that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict would have the necessary financial and material means to

carry out his mission, would cooperate with States in setting up immobilization and social reintegration programmes for child soldiers and, to the extent possible, would establish contact with the armed groups involved.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.